

brain, circulation, eyes, ears, muscles, balance, coordination and the ability to walk. Immediately report the onset of any new symptoms to your health care provider. These reportable symptoms or changes include, but are not limited to:

- Sudden confusion or memory loss
- Difficulty concentrating
- Visual changes such as blurry or double vision
- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness when sitting or standing
- Unsteadiness when walking
- Loss of urinary control
- Loss of balance
- Generalized or focal muscle weakness
- Fatigue

An important aspect of managing your medical condition is managing your medications. When medications produce unwanted or adverse side effects, call your health care provider immediately. Your health care provider will discuss the situation with you, ask questions to get more specific information and recommend the best course of action.

Step 5 – Keep a journal of your symptoms.

All health care providers want to know immediately if you experience an adverse effect from a prescriptive medication. This is important so that modifications to your treatment can be made. Simple modifications may include lowering the dosage (the strength of the medication), changing how often you take it, or eliminating it altogether.

If you have an adverse reaction, remember and write down what happened so that you can give your health care provider complete and accurate information about the adverse reaction. Your health care provider will want to know:

- What happened? Did you become lightheaded or confused? Did you become unsteady when you stood up? Did you fall and hurt yourself?
- When did it happen? Before or after a meal? In the morning or at the end of the day? Was this the first time it happened or can you predict it?
- Where did it occur? While walking, turning or reaching for an object?
- How did it progress? Did it go away or are you still experiencing the adverse effect? Did you do anything that helped to reduce or eliminate the symptom, such as sitting down or eating?

General Tips for Safety at Home

If any adverse symptoms occur, it is important to remain calm, notify your health care provider and take some of these simple steps to ensure your safety at home:

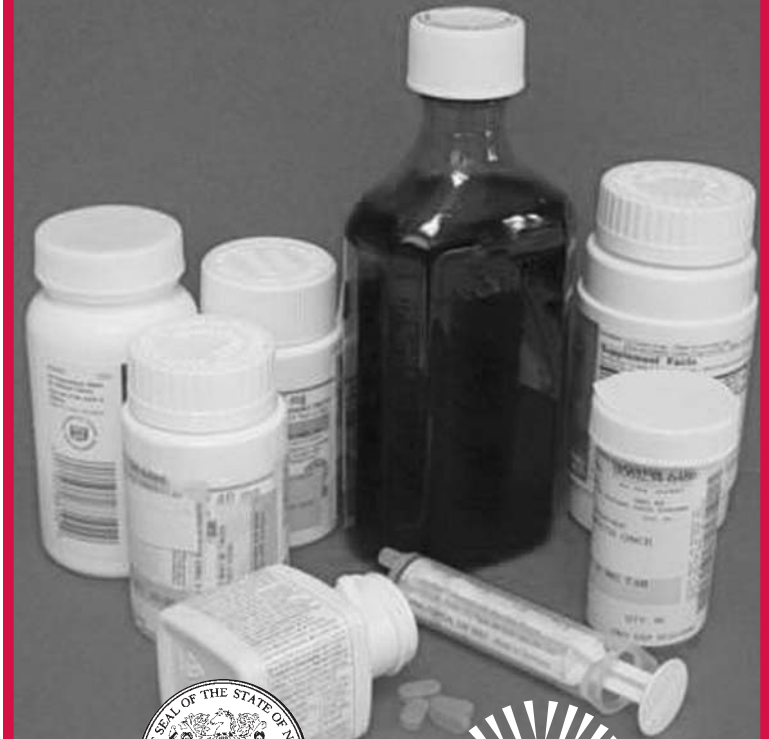
- If you feel fatigued, stop what you are doing and rest
- Rise slowly and hold onto sturdy objects when getting up or standing
- Use a walking aide for mobility if needed
- Have a neighbor or caregiver monitor you by calling at set times each day
- Purchase a personal emergency response system to get help if you cannot reach the phone
- Get help to re-arrange furniture and clear pathways in heavy trafficked rooms
- Avoid tight-neck collars on shirts
- Avoid turning your head too quickly
- Drink plenty of liquids (unless told otherwise by your health care provider)

Remember: Talk to your health care provider for the best quality of care.

Medications, Falls & You



**Take the necessary steps
to prevent falls for a
healthy, active life.**



Jon S. Corzine
Governor



Fred M. Jacobs, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner

Facts about Prescriptions & Falls

Each month, more than 137,000 seniors in New Jersey receive three or more prescriptive medications from their pharmacies¹. While prescriptions are very important in the management of chronic and other diseases effecting older adults, some medications can cause adverse or unwanted side effects. Among older adults, these side effects may include falling down, becoming confused and/or losing urinary control.

Falls are a common, often preventable problem among seniors. More than one-third of older adults age 65 and older fall each year and about 30% of these individuals suffer injuries that can decrease mobility and independence. Falls occur from multiple causes in older adults including diseases, environmental hazards and medications.

To maintain a healthy and active lifestyle it is important that you ask your health care provider to review your medications and identify those that may be causing problems for you. Often times, by simply switching medications or changing dosages, adverse or unwanted side effects will go away.

This step-by-step guide has been developed especially for you as a health care consumer. Follow the steps to prevent falls and other prescription-related problems:

Step 1 - Learn about your medications.

You should know the reason you are taking a particular medication, its name, dosage (strength), the right time to take it (such as before or after meals), and what side

effects to look for. Learning about your medications is an important part of managing your overall health.

Did you know that certain factors influence the effects of medications? Your health care provider should take these factors into consideration when prescribing medications to you:

- Your age, height and body weight
- Presence of other diseases
- Your hydration status (amount of fluid in your body)
- Your nutritional status (protein stores and food intake)
- Use of other medications
- Use of over-the-counter medications (cold remedies, laxatives, vitamins, aspirin, etc.)
- Use of alcoholic beverages
- Your kidney function
- Your cardiovascular function

Step 2 - Learn which medications are associated with falls.

Some medications can cause changes in the body that can result in falls for older adults. When sudden drops in blood pressure or heart rate, or drowsiness occurs, an older person is at greater risk of falling. Researchers have also determined that some classes or types of medications are associated with falls in the elderly^{2,3,4}, these include:

- Diuretics (water pills)
- Certain cardiovascular agents
- Hypnotics and sedatives (sleeping pills)
- Anti-anxiety and certain antidepressants
- Certain neuroleptic agents

Because older adults may go to different health care providers for different reasons, it is important that all your providers know exactly what medications you are taking.

This will minimize the chances that you will be prescribed a medication that will combine with other prescriptions you are taking and cause problems. Remember to review your medication with your health care providers each and every time you see him or her.

Step 3 - Brown bag it!

To avoid any confusion at all, it is recommended that you bring all the prescriptive and over-the-counter medications you are taking with you in a brown bag when you see your health care provider. He or she can then see all of your medications at a glance.

Step 4 - Identify troublesome symptoms that cause falls.

Sometimes the adverse side effects of a medication may produce symptoms that could cause an older adult to fall and get hurt. These symptoms commonly involve the



¹ NJ State Budget 2005-2006, Section D., p.153 electronic: www.state.nj.us/treasury/omb/publication/06budget/index.shtml

² Leipzig, RM., Cumming, RG., Tinetti, ME. Drugs and falls in older people: a systematic review and meta-analysis I. Psychotropic drugs. **Journal of the American Geriatrics Society** 1999; 47:30-9.
³ Leipzig, RM., Cumming, RG., Tinetti, ME. Drugs and falls in older people: a systematic review and meta-analysis II. Cardiac and analgesic drugs. **Journal of the American Geriatrics Society** 1999; 47:40-50.
⁴ Thapa, PB., Gideon, P., Cost, TW, Milam, AB., Ray, WA. Antidepressants and the risk of falls among nursing home residents. **New England Journal of Medicine** 1998: 339-875-82